

19 October 1983

MACNEIL: In a moment we're going to hear both sides of the covert aid debate in the Congress. First, we hear both sides in the struggle in Nicaragua from a key member of the Sandinista leadership and a leader of the contras, or rebels. Last week, on assignment for us, Charles Krause talked in Managua with Humberto Ortega, Nicaraguan defense minister and commander in chief, about the military situation. HUMBERTO

ORTEGA (Voice of Interpreter): What we see in the coming weeks is a worsening of military factors and the real possibility of war with Honduras, to the extent that Honduras is becoming more fully and directly involved in the aggression against Nicaragua. It's no longer the counter-revolutionaries receiving help from Honduras but rather the counter-revolutionaries as part of U.S. strategy to use Honduras to distract our forces and create conditions allowing Honduras to make overwhelming attacks against our revolution, against our army.

KRAUSE: Then you're expecting war with Honduras? ORTEGA: Against Nicaragua.

KRAUSE: And the United States? ORTEGA: Of course and with the support of the United States. There are American soldiers in Honduras with full logistical and adviser support, assurance of all kinds of material for aggression. Now, whether the United States is going to get directly involved in our war, that I can't predict. I'm not a fortune-telling wizard who can say exactly what will happen. But I can affirm that with the yankees and troops that are in Honduras, if there is a conflict between Honduras and Nicaragua, arising from the activities of the Somozista counter-revolutionaries, then the possibility of the U.S. getting involved in that conflict is much greater. The real scenario I see for the coming weeks is serious. It's deteriorating because efforts toward peace, efforts at understanding are not preceding a pace with the sabotage, the build-up of the Honduran forces and the counter-revolutionaries in Honduras and in Costa Rica.

KRAUSE: What's more likely, negotiations or war? ORTEGA: If the United States has a number of points to make that they believe Nicaragua is supplying arms to El Salvador, that Nicaragua has Cuban advisers or from elsewhere, etc., if there are a number of things that they don't like about Nicaragua, there are also aspects of U.S. policy that we don't like. And we think that there can and should be analysis, talks, discussions but in a framework of mutual respect, decent framework, a civilized framework, a framework without conditions, without abusing the strength of one over the other, without threats, without holding a gun to our head.

MACNEIL: Later, back in Washington, Charles Krause talked with Adolfo Calero, commander in chief of one of the largest contra groups, the FDN, or Democratic Forces of Nicaragua. Krause asked for his reading of the situation in Central America.

CALERO: Well, I would say the situation is real hot and, ah, it will continue to heat up. And, ah, we will not cease in our efforts to establish democracy in Nicaragua, by whatever means it takes. At the beginning, right after the Somoza overthrow, we, political parties, private enterprise, practically all Nicaraguans gave the Sandinistas the opportunity to establish a Democratic government. In January of this year we told the Sandinistas that we were ready, ah, to put down our arms if they would fulfill the commitments that they made to the Organization of American States for democracy, pluralism, elections, respect of human rights. And since none of those commitments have been fulfilled, ah, we have been obliged to take up arms against this sea of troubles that Nicaraguans are going through.

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KRAUSE: Why should the Nicaraguan people, or for that matter, the American people believe that your group, which has Somozista officers in, why should anyone believe that you are democratic? CALERO: Well, to begin with, there is not proof to the contrary. And I, in putting it positively, I think that the people who need FDN through their lifetime have proved to be people who want democracy, who have worked for democracy.

KRAUSE: Has the Reagan administration given you assurances that they will support you to that end? CALERO: We believe that there is a firm commitment on the part of this government and that the principal people in this government, like President Reagan and, ah, Ambassador Kirkpatrick and Secretary Shultz, they have continually made the statesmen, giving us, ah, let's say, hope.

KRAUSE: To what extent are CIA advisers helping you? CALERO: Well, CIA has no people, nor FBI people, for that matter, go around showing their identification. I could say that I have met no one who has shown me a CIA, ah, ah, identification card.

KRAUSE: Well, then, what is all of the money from the United States going for? CALERO: If the United States is giving us any money, which is something I couldn't prove in a courtroom. And if other people and other, from other countries are also giving us money, I mean, ah, that, ah, whatever we get goes for the armament we have, for the ammunition we have and, ah, and for the needs that an army would have.

LEHRER: Now to the debate in this country between two congressmen who will speak on opposite sides tomorrow when the contra aid issue goes to the House floor. They are Peter Kostmayer, Democrat of Pennsylvania, and Mark Siljander, Republican of Michigan. Both are members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Congressman Kostmayer, you want the aid cut off, is that correct? KOSTMAYER: That's right.

LEHRER: Why? KOSTMAYER: Well, I think there are a number of reasons. The first is that it's clearly illegal, against the law. In December of 1982, Congress passed the Boland amendment, which was quite clear in prohibiting any expenditure of American funds to assist in the destabilization or overthrowing of another government. Secondly, I think it runs strongly contrary....

LEHRER: Wait a minute. Let's, let's take that one, let's take that one first. Congressman Siljander, how do you argue the, what, what's your answer to the legality argument? SILJANDER: Well, we have other commitments, the UN Charter, the OAS agreement, the Rio Pact, the Monroe Doctrine, by which we stand by, commitments we've made to our fellow Americans, plus the issue really is we're not out to overthrow the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. That is a misnomer, a misunderstanding of the issue.

LEHRER: All right. KOSTMAYER: Well, I visited the contra camps and saw 15, 16, 17-year-old kids heavily armed with machine guns. They are there to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, not to influence or to moderate policy. The Boland amendment speaks not to these general principles and policies but specifically to Nicaragua. And it says that the CIA should not be expending, as it is now, millions of dollars to assist in the destabilization or overthrowing a government. No....

LEHRER: What do you see the purpose of the contras to be, Congressman Siljander? SILJANDER: Well, there are two clear purposes. Number one, certainly we're supporting the contras who are demanding, ah, fulfillment of commitments made by the Sandinistas before the Organization of American States, free election, freedom of

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speech, freedom of press, freedom of religion and labor unions, none of which, none of which have been, ah, followed through by the Sandinista government. Secondly, we are there to stop the export of arms and revolution, which is clearly happening by the Sandinista, especially, specifically into El Salvador. And the next target, as we heard by Ortega himself, likely will be Honduras.

LEHRER: What's wrong with that, Congressman? KOSTMAYER: Well, let me say two things. First of all, the bill which we'll consider tomorrow which cuts off covert funding for the contras provides \$50 million for arms interdiction. So, we're not suggesting the United States....

LEHRER: You means arms interdiction, arms going from Nicaragua to El Salvador? KOSTMAYER: Nicaragua to El Salvador, absolutely. We recognize that that's occurring to some extent. No one's quite sure how much. We're not talking about some kind of unilateral irresponsible withdrawal of American involvement in Central America. We authorized the expenditure of \$50 million in 1984, to assist friendly nations in stopping the flow of weapons from Nicaragua to El Salvador. Secondly, the administration's concern with free labor unions, elections, democratic political principles doesn't apply in Chile. It doesn't apply in Argentina or in South Africa. The Reagan administration's concern with these issues is, is really quite new.

LEHRER: Is that true, Congressman? SILJANDER: It is, it's nothing new. What we're attempting to do is force commitments, freedom, freedom of basic human rights and self-determination. I am more than willing to cut off all covert aid. Now my, my fellow colleague is willing to contribute overt aid, which implies premise of potential involvement of overt war. We're talking about assisting freedom fighters, in my opinion fighting for their own freedom. I wanted to cut it off, if the Sandinistas are willing to call for internationally supervised elections, before so all sides may campaign freely, during so there's not interference and after so whomever wins will take power. And if they win, the left wins, we should then as a government agree to pull out all assistance, arms, any type.

LEHRER: Let 'em have it, just let 'em have it? SILJANDER: Let 'em have it. If the people really want the Marxists backed by 7000 Cuban troops, 1000 Soviet bloc advisers and 800 to 1000 (inaudible) Libyans that are using the Nicaragua as their base for exporting revolution. If they want that, let them have it.

LEHRER: To the vote tomorrow, specifically, Congressman Kostmayer, you heard what the contra leader told Charles Krause. He says that he feels he has a commitment from the United States government, from President Reagan, Secretary Shultz, Ambassador Kirkpatrick for, for the U.S. support. If you all do vote to cut this support off, what have you done, what have you done to those folks? KOSTMAYER: I think Congress made its commitment very clear in December, 1982, when it adopted the Boland amendment. And the contras, ah, should, should be aware of that. The question is very simply....

LEHRER: You don't see this as undercutting the president? KOSTMAYER: I think it undercuts a bad policy, the policy which is to overthrow governments with whom we have some very legitimate disagreements. And I'm certainly not an admirer of the Sandinistas. The question is fundamental. Should the United States be in the business of overthrowing governments whose policies we do not agree with?

LEHRER: What do you think would be the impact of a negative vote tomorrow in the House? SILJANDER: Well, the impact of a negative vote certainly will send ripples that we have not made a firm commitment and sticking to our UN charter commitments or

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Rio Pact commitments, our OAS commitments, the Organization of American States. And let me repeat, the, the contention made that we're there to overthrow the Nicaraguan government is erroneous. It has been stated time and time again by them by the secretary of state and the president of the United States our policy is not to overthrow the government. KOSTMAYER: I think the impact.... SILJANDER: But the two points that I made earlier.... KOSTMAYER: The impact will be very clear. The impact will be simply that we don't accept a military solution; we believe in a political solution. That's what the impact of this will be.

LEHRER: Let me, let me ask you both this question. Both the, both gentlemen we just heard, uh, from the ground on both sides down there say things are getting hot, there's gonna be war. Which, how would the vote up or down impact on that situation, Congressman Siljander? SILJANDER: Well, number one, the interdiction of arms has proven to be successful. We've caught Libyan vessels. We've found fishing villas along the Nicaraguan coast used to export and store arms. I talked to a former assistant ambassador in the Sandinista regime... KOSTMAYER: And we're not opposed to the interdiction of arms. SILJANDER: Well, are you gonna answer my question or I... KOSTMAYER: We provide 50, 50 million. SILJANDER: ...Or may I answer my own question? KOSTMAYER: Sure. SILJANDER: Thank you. I talked to an assistant ambassador formerly to Honduras who had involvement with the Cubans and Soviets, and he says clearly that the involvement of the contras, as they accelerate their involvement, the attention goes to stabilizing the bastion of revolution, Nicaragua. The Cubans make decisions. They firmly are committed to forgetting El Salvador, for stop (sic) the arms shipment and let's worry about keeping Nicaragua stable, stable. So it will have a very negative impact.

LEHRER: Do you, Congressman Kostmayer, agree with Ortega's scenario that the more the U.S. supports the contras the more likely there's gonna be a war with Honduras? KOSTMAYER: Well, I wonder, I think we have to ask ourselves what happens when the contras cross from Honduras where they're based into Nicaragua for these raids in which they are engaging and the Nicaraguan army pursues them into Honduras. I think the possibility of a wider war is, is a very realistic possibility. I think we're running that risk.

LEHRER: If, if that should happen, Congress Siljander, should the United States get involved? SILJANDER: United States should not get involved. The president said there will not be troops involved in combat, combat in Central America. And...

LEHRER: No matter what happens? KOSTMAYER: But there are 20,000 American troops in Central America now on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts of Nicaragua, and another 8 to 10,000 troops based in... We're only asking for trouble. It's awfully easy to send those American soldiers in. It's mighty tough to get them out. SILJANDER: Here, here's what we've asked for. Every year or two we've had routine military maneuvers in Honduras. This is nothing new. The difference is, certainly the timing is appropriate, and a show of force, within 48 hours of our show of force and the acceleration of contras' efforts in Nicaragua, all of a sudden the Sandinistas for the first time in months come out with a six-point peace plan. Proof is positive. We are out for a non-militaristic solution, and the only way to do that, and is clearly to force the Sandinistas into sitting down at the negotiating table, talking about elections, talking about freedom of self-determination. KOSTMAYER: (simultaneously with Lehrer) I think the...

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LEHRER: The toughest question... KOSTMAYER: I think the opposite has happened there. They've turned more and more to the Soviet Union and to Cuba, I think, as a result of all this.

LEHRER: Toughest question of all, Congressmen. How's the vote going to go tomorrow? KOSTMAYER: It's going to be very close. We had a meeting with the leadership this afternoon and it's going to be terribly close. I can't predict it, although I think we have a chance of winning it by a very narrow margin. SILJANDER: I think that it's likely the Congress will pass the Boland-Zablocki language. It's unfortunate...

LEHRER: Meaning cutting off the aid? SILJANDER: Yes, I think they will. It will not go through the Senate, so I encourage those freedom fighters in Nicaragua that while the Congress may not keep up with their commitments, at least on the House side, I hope the Senate will maintain commitments that we've made to the freedom fighters to force their, their opponents into the negotiating table. Not to war, but to the negotiating table.

LEHRER: Gentlemen, thank you both very much.